

# Life of the Spirit

A BLACKFRIARS REVIEW



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# Life of the Spirit

A review devoted to the theology and practice of prayer and the spiritual life, it is designed to assist in the re-establishment of the Catholic tradition of ascetical and mystical writing in the English language. Contributors are therefore encouraged to submit original MSS. or translations from the Fathers.

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# Life of the Spirit

VOL. II

DECEMBER 1947

No. 18

## IN THE BEGINNING

BY

VINCENT McNABB, O.P., S.T.M.<sup>1</sup>



IN the beginning was the Word . . . (St John I, 1.) Unfortunately in the world today there are a great number of words. There are so many words that you do not know how to escape them. We have however the power to choose the best—we should *not* choose the second best. They who have the Word of Christ our Lord must choose the best Word. Listen to his words—make them your own. How glad I should be if I could impress on you some little word, make you take it for your own and think about it. There are some people who listen to the Gospel, but they do not really hold that Jesus Christ is God. They do not take the word of Eternal Life. When you find a great deal of decay in the Church and in religious life, it is because our Lord's words have not been accepted. The words of the holy Gospels—that is TRUTH. Let us have the TRUTH. Sometimes we must face truths that are not easy to flesh and blood . . . we must listen . . . we must ask the WORD to give us the inner meaning. . . . And, oh! if for a few days we hardly hear anything else, if for a few days other things seem almost an interruption, an impertinence, blessed are we!

Oh! If we could live for a week—just with the Word. Sit at Nazareth with the Word, in that little home from which, one day—all great things will come. Oh! that we may measure spiritual greatness by material littleness, that the waste places of our soul might blossom, that the crooked ways might be made straight, that our selfishness might mean almost a sacrilege. We should then become true children of St Dominic, in anguish and in sorrow for Christ. . . . (In the Office of St Dominic there is this very simple little phrase: *Agonizans pro Christi nomine*—‘anguished for the name of Christ’.) But let us go back further than the Middle Ages, the time of St Dominic and St Francis, let us go back to Jesus of Nazareth. They went back there too. Jesus who alone could save the world. . . . God grant us, during these days, to hear his Word, which will be put before us in simplicity and truth.

<sup>1</sup> From a Retreat on the Gospel of St John preached at St Dominic's Priory, Stone.

## II

The holy Gospel according to St John: 1, 9 et sqq: *That was the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world. . . . And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. . . .*

Any words of my own will of course seem only an insult to these very perfect words of the great seer of Patmos. St John is doing, through these words, something of very great importance for the Church. He is letting us see who the Son of God is . . . that we might believe, that we may not be like the world which does not know him, or like that other class, still more painful, those who know him but do not receive him. That is a terrible class! (I often wonder whether I belong to it.) Not to know him is really better than to know him and not receive him. St John tells us who he is—he is the *Son of God*.

St Matthew, when describing the beginning of things tells us of Bethlehem, in many ways beautiful. The children like to hear it—of how a little one was born and great kings came and gave him nice things. If we had only that account we might think that our dear Lord was born in great affluence. There is no mention of a stable—nothing like that. Just the birth of *One* who, of course, had royal blood in his veins. And to whom the kings came from afar, bringing gold, frankincense, myrrh. That is all very beautiful and that is the sort of Jesus, in a sense, quite easy to imitate, except that our birth is not usually welcomed by kings. That would be the sort of thing that would fit in with 'Arabian Nights' and other various beautiful books.

It had never dawned on St Matthew, of course, that people might mistake what he said. I presume they were mistaken. And St Luke is at pains to tell us, in his account, of the poverty of the Birth at Bethlehem. Such utter poverty that it is a stable that welcomes this little one. His clothing was that of an outcast, almost. That completes Matthew's account. We have now the real Christmas, the Christmas of the Crib, the Stable, the Manger, and how we love that *Babe* more than the Babe of St Matthew. This is the Babe we all love—the Babe that attracts the love and sympathy of quite little children. I remember the story of a little boy who when he first came to the Crib observed it for a few moments, then made his way inside and began to rub the little feet of the Infant. He was so cold, he said.

That is the Jesus that now begins to tear our heart with love. We want to do something for him. We want to do something to him.

Now, St John completes all that by telling us something about that Child. . . .



St John gives us some insight into who the Child is and whence he came. . . . He is the Son of God, and his birth in such a place is not accident, it is design. It is *the play*. It is an eternal idea, as it were, worked out very elaborately, therefore to be thought about very carefully. To be loved, for we too can again be born. Nicodemus put that objection to our Lord.

There is a spiritual birth that must be modelled on that of Bethlehem—St Paul has expressed it so beautifully in his lesson from prison (Phil. 2, 14): 'Each one not considering the things that are his own, but those that are other men's, for let this *mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus*'! Mind in you . . . as in Christ Jesus. That is what he was thinking. You can imagine him, as saying to our Lord: My dear Master, I am thinking what *you* are thinking. . . . 'Who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God . . . he *emptied himself*'. . . . St Paul's soul became extraordinarily tender after they put him in prison. Anything like hardness in his character seemed at once softened, bitterness turned almost instantly into sweetness. (I do not know whether prison would improve some of us! I'm sure it would improve me! Sometimes I think it does the Church good to be put in prison—it comes out sweet.)

Now St John has told us of this emptying 'taking the form of a slave' (*doulos*) being made in the likeness of man—and in the habit found as a man. He *humbled* himself, becoming 'obedient unto death'. In the stable he is obedient unto life!

Now that is a great fundamental fact—and divine facts are divine principles, not like the other little facts of ordinary human life that are *not* principles—little facts that make up our tittle-tattle or news—these are not principles. But a divine fact is a divine principle. You can think about it. (Take the Rosary, for instance; it is not a number of Hail Marys pell-mell one after the other. Oh no. These are fifteen great facts, principles, that you cannot exhaust in a life of fifteen hundred years, if you could live that long.) Now you have this great fundamental fact that it was the Son of God, who did not think it robbery to be equal with God, and St John tells us this *is* God. The Word who had made the whole world. *The Word was God*. . . . *Theos en o Logos*. Who now came into this world of human beings and—as St John says so beautifully, *dwelt among us*—I love to point out the beauty of the word which St John uses here. The original Greek is, *eskenosen en emin*, which means he pitched his tent, as it were, with us, or amongst us. This word is extraordinarily rarely used. It is practically the same word which St Peter uses at the Transfiguration when he says: 'Let us build here three taber-

nacles or tents'. In the East, of course, many people go about living in tents, setting them up here and there—a little group of tents, having no abiding city. The Chosen People began their existence as a group of dwellers in tents. In the centre of their tents was the Tabernacle where they worshipped God. In the centre of the tents was the Ark for the worship of God. Now-a-days that idea is no longer considered. No wonder the world is coming down about our ears. It is for us to restore that idea and we can only restore it by realising more and more the words read out this morning. St John represents our Lord as coming down and dwelling in a tent. When he came he overlooked all kinds of things. There were all sorts of human contrivances for doing wonderful things when Jesus was on earth. You can read about them in books. In the days of our Lord cities were wonderful, almost as wonderful as London, New York, Chicago, etc. organised most perfectly, and on all these things our blessed Lord deliberately turned his back. It really must mean something to our individual souls if we wish to reach holiness, sanctity—you can only begin at the beginning. There is no doubt where you must begin. It is hard to flesh and blood. St John says we are born *not* of the flesh, and our Lord said so strikingly: 'I did not come to bring peace but the sword'. Is there any greater peace than to welcome the sword? And on the night that you welcomed the sword you spoke of almost nothing but peace. My peace I give unto you. The peace of the accepted sword. And that is the peace which comes by following Jesus of Nazareth. ('A sword shall pierce thy soul.')

Only Jesus of Nazareth, the Jesus who out of love for us individually has gone out into something worse than the desert. . . . The desert is Paradise with him. I do not think we shall find him anywhere else than in the desert. We may seek him, as it were, in the streets and the cities; we shall not find him. But if we go out into the desert we shall find him, for there he is seeking us.

Let us dwell in one of these tents. Let us as it were see the wisdom of that cry of Peter: 'Let us build three tabernacles—one for thee'. Only in the desert shall we find him, and if we do not find him we shall not find ourselves. I am sure our blessed Lord is now yearning over the world which has, in so many ways, strayed from him. And yearning over us who make special profession to love and follow him even out into the desert places. If there ever was a time when Jesus of Nazareth was standing at the door of our heart and knocking I am sure it is today when all the world around, both men and women, seem to be casting aside all that makes them men and women. When intelligence is in revolt, when intelligence is even more than in revolt, it is teaching others to revolt. When hearts that were



made for the great purpose of self-sacrifice are only working for the selfish ends. . . . Is there anything we can learn of the world except to despise it? Can the world in any way be our teacher?

Rabboni, my Master, my Teacher—that was the cry of Magdalen, the model of all mankind, insomuch as she was a sinner and we are all sinners. . . . Rabboni, my Master! His first lesson is but a rehearsal of his last. Love of little things—little things perhaps to us, but great in the sight of God. May our Master then give us strength not to dread the sword, whatever it may be. May we not even seek peace, but only him. Whilst we are here below it is 'Jesus of Nazareth' and even 'Jesus of Golgotha' that we must seek. He is the *one* object of our love. It is he alone whom we desire, he for whom our hearts burn. For whom our eyes seek. Come, then, O Jesus of Nazareth and dwell within my heart. Set up thy tabernacle there, pitch thy tent. Make me a dwelling place for thee!

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## THE WORD MANIFEST

BY

S. M. ALBERT, O.P.

*He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him and will manifest myself to him.*—John 14, 21.



THE feast of the Nativity is the feast of the birth of the Word; his eternal generation in the bosom of the Father, his temporal birth; and his mystical birth in the souls of men, in which is involved their birth to divine life.

The Christmas liturgy is at different times concerned with each of these aspects of the Mystery.

*Dominus dixit ad me. Filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te*, is the triumphal Introit to Midnight Mass.

*Puer natus est nobis, et Filius datus est nobis*, is the opening of the Third Mass, but it is Christ's mystical birth in us, and our birth in him, upon which the Church is most insistent.

*Recensita nativitate, novitas natalis, nova nativitas*, are phrases which recur continually, and the Postcommunion for the Third Mass, which is repeated daily as the commemoration, expresses the mystery concisely:

Grant we beseech thee, o Almighty God, that as the *new-born* Saviour of the world is the author of our *divine regeneration*, so also he himself may be the giver of immortality.

The Postcommunion for the Aurora Mass hints at the mode of this birth:

May this new birth set forth in this Sacrament ever renew us,

O Lord, whose wonderful birth did destroy the old man within us.

This new birth is effected in and through 'this Sacrament', the Holy Eucharist, which is at once Sacrament and Sacrifice. The same Incarnate Word appears upon the earth as appeared in the manger at Bethlehem. But here, the cradle to which he comes, is the Altar of Sacrifice; he at whose word he becomes present, is the sacrificing priest; the act whereby he is brought down is the continuation and commemoration of the death of the Cross, while the Holy Communion in which he is united to souls is the consummation of the sacrifice, a sacrificial banquet. Finally, this death, which is also a birth, is the source of all life, of all grace, of all regeneration, of all immortality, and so the Lessons for Christmas Night speak of the Redemption as already an accomplished fact. The Incarnation of the Word was directed to the Redemption, but the Redemption is the source and instrument of the perpetuation of that Incarnation, and its realisation in each individual man. *Mirabile mysterium.*

The Postcommunion for the Circumcision speaks of the 'mystery of this hidden birth'—*arcanae nativitatis mysterium*. It is a birth hidden from every point of view.

The eternal generation of the Word takes place within the abyss of the Trinity, which of its very nature is inaccessible to every created intelligence. All the operations of God *ad extra* proceed from the Blessed Trinity acting in unity, so that the plurality of Persons could never be discovered from these operations, though, once revealed, it can be traced in them. The mystery of the triune life could only be known if God himself deigned to reveal it, and even when known, it still remains a mystery of which the depths can never be sounded by the created intellect.

The temporal birth, too, was hidden from men. It took place in the middle of the night, and was revealed by heaven only to a few shepherds, who, while they may have realised that the Saviour of the world was born, cannot have known the miraculous nature of his coming. Joseph was the guardian of the secret of the Virgin Birth.

The mystical birth is even more hidden. Neither the regeneration of the soul in baptism nor the invisible mission of the Word when the soul grows in grace fall within the perception of the senses. The en-graced soul may sometimes 'feel' the presence of God within him, but such feelings are no guarantee of the fact of that Presence, which will very often exist without them.

But although Christmas is essentially the feast of the 'hidden



birth', the element of manifestation is there. By the mere act of appearing among men, God manifests himself to them, and the shepherds were witnesses of this manifestation. The Collect for the Aurora Mass prays that 'we who are bathed in the new light of the Incarnate Word may show forth in our works what shines forth in our minds by faith', and it is this aspect of the mystery which the Church emphasises in the feast of the Epiphany. Originally this was the Oriental equivalent of the Western feast of Christmas, but it has come to be as it were the consummation and completion of that mystery.

The Word was made flesh, and he was seen by the Jews in the persons of the Shepherds, and by the Gentiles in the persons of the Magi. Yet the light which shone upon them was only a passing flash, after which it was veiled and remained hidden for thirty years, nor do we know how much was revealed to them.

At the baptism of Jesus, the mystery of his Person was manifested to John, who saw the heavens opened and the Holy Ghost descending, while the Father's Voice said: 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased', but the revelation was apparently for John alone. At Cana the miracle performed by Jesus manifested to his disciples his supernatural power, and made them realise that he was not as the rest of men, while on Thabor he showed a glimpse of his glory to the chosen three. But in spite of this in his last talk before his death he had to complain: 'So long have I have been with you, and you have not known me', and he promised the manifestation of himself yet to be made, as the reward of those who kept his commandments, and thereby proved their love for him.

And so it becomes obvious that it is only too easy for the Light to be shining in the darkness, while the darkness does not see nor comprehend it. We may well have 'celebrated the mystery of the hidden birth of our Lord Jesus Christ' without having reached 'the vision of a mind that is purified' for which the Secret of the Circumcision prays. The vision of faith which we possessed at Christmas does not go far enough, so the Church, in the Collect for the Epiphany, prays that 'we who now know thee by faith, may be led to contemplate the beauty of thy Majesty'. The Epiphany is surely, therefore, the great feast of contemplation, of that experimental knowledge of God which he grants when the Three, having made their home in the soul—and still more when the soul has made them its home—begin to 'manifest themselves', to make the happy soul conscious of their presence, conscious of its own incorporation into their divine life, of its admission into their society. This is the light of the Gifts of Wisdom and Understanding, a light which is love and life, for it is the created

reflection of him who is the true light which enlightens and enkindles, the Word which breathes forth Love. *In lumine tuo videbimus lumen.*

But before the indwelling God can be known and perceived in this manner a great purity of mind and heart is necessary; the purification of the mind from sensible images, of the heart from all inordinate affections. Therefore in the Secret for the Circumcision the Church prays that 'through these gifts wherein we celebrate the hidden birth of Jesus Christ our Lord, *we may reach the clear vision of a mind that is purified*'. And again, in the Postcommunion for the Epiphany, 'Grant we beseech Thee, O Almighty God, that what we celebrate in solemn rite, *we may attain through the understanding of a mind that is purified*'. On the Vigil of the Epiphany we ask that 'the splendour of the coming feast *may illumine our hearts*' (Collect), and that God will enlighten his people and enkindle in their hearts the splendour of his grace (Postcommunion), while the Postcommunion for the Octave day combines the two requests and asks 'that we may discern with clear insight and receive with worthy affection the mystery in which thou wouldst have us participate'.

This manifestation is the free gift of God made to whom he wills, but he wills to make it to each one, if only we are prepared to receive it. Yet even this preparation is his doing: 'There is no doer but he' (Mother Julian). And the means whereby both the preparation for, and the realisation of the mystery are to be achieved, are the very mysteries themselves, which like the Sacraments contain the power to effect that which they signify. The Word who expresses both the Father and every creature is he by whom all things are made. He is the Mirror and Image of the Father, and also the light in which that Image is seen. He is the eternal Son, and it is in virtue of his human birth that men are born as sons of God. He is 'the author of these our gifts' (Secret for the Octave day): he 'who appeared in the substance of our mortal flesh restored us by the new light of his own immortality' (Preface) so that he is at once 'the author of our divine regeneration and the giver of immortality'. (Postcommunion, Sunday within Octave of Christmas). It is the wonderful birth of the Word which destroys the old man in us (Postcommunion, Aurora Mass), and it is this *admirabile commercium*, this 'sacred intercourse', whereby we are redeemed and made like to Him in whom our nature is united to the Godhead. (Cf. Secret, Midnight Mass.)

All this leads back to the essential reality of the mystery of the Incarnation. The Word, the Eternal Son and the manifestation of the Father within the Trinity, unites to himself a human nature and is born as man in order to manifest God to men and to enable them to be redeemed and born again and united to God. That is the mys-



tery in which 'he would have us partake' (Postcommunion, Octave day) which is 'celebrated in the Sacrifice of the Mass' (Secret, Circumcision), wherein is 'revealed, immolated and received' he to whom 'the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh were once offered' (Secret, Epiphany). It is the mystery of the adoption of sons, of his birth in us and our birth in him, of his incorporation into a human family, in order that we, in our turn, may be incorporated into the family of the blessed Trinity. And if sons, heirs also, heirs to all the riches of the divinity which consist in God's knowledge and love of himself. Therefore the Word Incarnate and the Father love the soul into which they have infused a love for themselves, and they manifest themselves to it, first in the light of faith, and gradually, if it responds to their advances, in the 'light of the Incarnate Word', which becomes ever more luminous until the shadows retire and that eternal day dawns in which it will see the beauty of the divine Majesty in the light of the Word, in the home of eternal light—*patriam claritatis aeternae*. (Collect, Vigil of the Epiphany.) Until that day dawns it will be above all in and through the Liturgy in which Christ renews his mysteries and reproduces in his mystical body—as a whole and in individual members—those aspects of his life and love which these feasts set forth, that this manifestation will take place.

O God, who hast illumined this most sacred night with the brightness of the true light: grant, we beseech thee, that we who have known the mysteries of that light on earth may also enjoy its happiness in heaven. Amen. (Collect for Midnight Mass.)

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## ADVENT THOUGHTS FOR MENTAL PRAYER

· BY

A DOMINICAN OF HEADINGTON

1. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.* The Word of the Father uttered from all eternity. Adore him in the bosom of the Father . . . rejoice and exult in his infinite perfections, thank him that he is himself. . . . Humble ourselves and be glad that our poor, puny minds cannot comprehend him. . . . Love him with the love of the Father and the Holy Ghost. 'The Word is in your heart'—he deigns to make his heaven within us. The generation of the Word is going on in our souls at this very moment. . . . What a stupendous thought! Ask him to let us think of nothing else, care for nothing else, and to make our souls truly his heaven. . . .

## II. *And the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us.*

The utter annihilation of the Incarnate Word. Beg him to give us a clearer understanding of it. . . . He who is co-equal with the Father now has a human body and a human soul. . . . He, Life itself, is dependent for his human life upon one of his creatures! Let us sink down into the abyss of our own nothingness that we may come nearer to him, though we can never sink low enough to reach him. Ask him to draw us to himself. . . . Love and adore him with Mary's love and adoration. Beg the Holy Spirit to overshadow us that we too may bring forth Jesus in our souls. Offer the Incarnate Word to the Father as our perfect adoration, love, reparation and thanksgiving.

## III. *The Incarnate Word in the Blessed Sacrament.*

Every day he is born anew in us. Our hearts become the bosom of Mary. . . . Long for our Lady's purity and humility; above all for her love. *Non horruisti Virginis uterum!* Even our spotless Mother was unworthy to be the tabernacle of the Word . . . and we thank him for that incomprehensible love which makes him delight to dwell in us. 'He emptied himself'—O that we might empty ourselves of everything but the desire to love him and to make him loved! At least not of us let it be said: 'He came unto his own and his own received him not'.

IV. *And the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come! Come Lord Jesus.* Long for the coming of Jesus. 'O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down!' The Spirit of Love within us excites our desires. . . . Beg the Word to listen to the 'unspeakable groanings' of the Holy Ghost and to our feeble cries united with his strong prayer. Unite our longings with the ardent desire of our blessed Lady to see the Sacred Face of her Babe. 'Show me thy Face, o my Beloved!' 'My soul hath desired thee in the night'. Ask him to give us such burning desires that he will be forced to give himself to our prayers. 'Reveal thy Presence and let the vision of thy Beauty kill me (i.e., all that is earthly in me)'. Behold the disease of love is incurable save in the possession of the Beloved—not thy gifts, not thy consolations but thyself—Come Lord Jesus!



## L O G O S

BY

COLUMBA CARY ELWES, O.S.B.



It is not unreasonable to try to discover why St John chose the Greek word 'logos' in describing the second person of the blessed Trinity to Greek-speaking converts. The only way to discover why is to see just what meaning it had in current speech to induce him to consider it suitable for his purpose; and to see secondly what modification or modifications he had to introduce into its meaning so that it really would fulfil its function as a key word in Trinitarian doctrine. We may find that its chief virtue was that it was, of all the terms to hand, least likely to be misunderstood.

The word 'logos' was used by Plato, the Stoics, Philo and Plutarch. It was current coinage in Greek thought, one of those words whose meaning was fluid enough, somewhat as democracy or liberty are in our politically-minded age. But at the back of all these interpretations or uses and shades of meaning of 'logos', there still remained one which may be summed up in another: reason. The philosophers all were seeking the reason for things; that was the Greek contribution to the world. Sometimes they expressed their findings as an inexorable Law within the universe, sometimes as the expression in God's mind of what this order should be. Never, so says Père Lagrange,<sup>1</sup> did they truly come to think of 'logos' as personified or as creative; it was always rather a rational aspect, either of God, or of the universe. But this was sufficient to tempt St John to choose it or at least not to discard it, as the word to describe Christ in his divine nature.

Obviously quite apart from the choice of this Greek word there is the other question: was the doctrine it was going to carry directly revealed to St John, or did he find it ready made, or nearly so? Clearly this was not the case among the Greeks, nor was it so in the Old Testament, despite some premonitions. It remains that Christ revealed the Trinity to the Apostles. How best to express it may have been left to their intelligence guided by the Holy Spirit.

That God's thought should be another person could not have occurred to the Greeks; this was something only knowable by revelation; but obscurely they had reached the idea—chiefly through the soaring minds of Plato and Aristotle—that God was thought. All John had to do was to allow no mistake to creep into the minds of his readers about the dualism of the universe, God and creation, and to show, not that Christ was the 'logos' in the universe—as the Stoics

1 Cf. P. Lagrange's article 'Vers le Logos de St Jean' in *Revue Biblique*, 1923, p. 3.

would have it—not intelligence, separated from the universe by a great gulf fixed—as Aristotle would have it—not merely the Platonic exemplar, an aspect of the divinity, but the expression of God's thought, yes, and the cause as well as the exemplar of the order or reason in the universe.

By the time St John wrote his gospel the Church was far from being a Jewish sect, and no matter what the biblical echoes of the word 'logos' may have been, the ordinary current Greek use would be steadily before his readers' minds. Nor was his gospel so simple; it is a profound mystical work, and many of his readers would have been followers of the various schools of Greek thought. It therefore seems inconceivable that he should not have weighed using such a word in the light of its common significance, and consequently it is not out of place to see how suitably he did use it; his aim being to convert his Greek-thinking converts to the new Christian revelation. It was not a borrowing of Greek thought, but an expression of Christian revelation in Greek dress.

It is certain that for a stoic . . . there is nothing more divine than reason. The world is ruled by reason, it has developed by reason, it is maintained, it is what it is, being eternal, by the action of the rational principle. Man, the most noble thing in the world, is only man because of reason. His duty is to follow the right reason and only in so doing will he find happiness. Now reason is the Greek 'logos'. The 'logos' then is the principle and mover in all the stoic philosophy. . . . But we must know stoicism for what it is, a pure pantheism which does not allow of attributing to the 'logos' either the rôle of creator or that of an intermediary in creating, nor even of an exemplar of the world, nor even a divine supernatural force which communicates to man special lights.

Finally the equal use of 'logos' and 'nous' to mean the active principle, the predominance of 'logos' to mean the impersonal reason, the law, the moral code, and especially the survival of traditional religions, prevent us from considering the 'logos' as the metaphysical being 'par excellence' for signifying the active principle in the world, as though it had been in the popular mind a way of saying God or a great divine being.<sup>2</sup>

There is not the slightest indication that St John went into the pagan world to find this notion of 'word' in order to introduce it ready made into a thought that the revelation of Jesus Christ, Life, Light and Son of God had fashioned. Where would he have taken it from? and where do we find it such as he has given it to us? Nowhere, neither in Philo's school nor in stoicism. The philonic school and stoicism, if they did not play the part of origin, did they not perhaps at least that of stimulators or determinants? No one has the slightest idea. There is no shadow of a clue, no positive

<sup>2</sup> Lagrange, *Revue Biblique*, 1923, pp. 175-6.



indication. . . . If it were necessary to bring in some determining factor other than the 'suggestions' of the Holy Spirit, it were better to search in the thought and even in the language of the Old Testament. And perhaps quite simply in the traditional connection between the notions of life and the word of God, transported, in the light of the Gospel, into the full mystery of the relationship between the Father and the Son.<sup>3</sup>

No one would contradict these two eminent writers. They are at pains to show that St John did not pick up his doctrine from any of these Greek philosophers, Plato or Philo the Jew, or the stoics. What P. Lagrange and P. Lemonnyer are anxious to prevent is the possibility of anyone believing that St John found his doctrine among the Greeks and stole it, or that he found some of it, and that, by combination with his ideas, produced the final result we know. This is a very laudable aim, and its perfectly true end must be kept in mind. My aim is different. I say, let us start with the revelation of the Trinity, three Persons, yet one thing, and all three equal, then how are we best going to express this mystery? In the Greek language you will do it best, as St John has done, by taking over the word 'logos' which already had some analagous meanings; apply these meanings, modify them, and make them serve the purposes of Catholic theology. It is like a man preaching to modern scientists. He might say, 'You talk about a Law of Nature, certain principles in nature, you talk about God being a mathematician, having a mind. Up to a point you are right. But this law, this idea in the universe, is really distinct from the universe—which is mostly inert matter—and this principle, or idea, or law, created the universe; it is indeed God, God's idea, himself and yet the expression of himself'. Such a person would be taking the words out of the mouths of his hearers and giving them an infinitely deeper meaning, new meaning, without entirely stripping them of their original content. This is what St John was doing when under God's guidance he chose the word 'logos'.

Among the many problems there must have been two of outstanding importance that presented themselves to the apostles when trying to explain to the Graeco-Jewish world who Christ was. The first was: how to explain that Christ was God, and second: how to show that he was not God the Father, that there were two persons within one Godhead. The first problem was one for the Greeks, the second one especially for the Jews. For the Greeks had a very vague idea of God, though they had many gods; for the Jews the idea of God, and the unity of God, was so strong that any duality seemed blasphemy.

To have said that Christ was God would have put him in the category of the Emperors, who were being deified even before their

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3 Lemonnyer, *La Théologie du Nouveau Testament*, p. 180.

death. St John had to find some expression which would lift up our Lord out of that world of human adulation into the world of metaphysics. He chose the word 'logos'. The reason for this is not far to seek for it was still sufficiently fluid in meaning not to falsify what he wanted to say, and yet not so untrue that it could not be baptised by a crystallising of one of its meanings.

In the Greek world the word 'logos' had come to be used as we have seen by the stoic philosophers to express the idea of underlying reasonableness in the world, the law inherent in the world's life. The manifestation of mind in things, the inevitableness in what happened. It had no sense of being creative, but merely factual. The idea in the universe, not a person outside causing the order, but just the logic of the thing itself.

In order to span the gap between the Greek mind and the Christian idea, St John had to take some idea intelligible to both. The word 'logos' was the span, the bridge. The Old Testament had very much the same idea in the Wisdom books. But whereas the Greek emphasis led to fatalism, an inevitability and a gloom unimaginable to a Christian, the Jews, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, when all trends round them were towards fatalism, preserved that vital principle of free will.<sup>4</sup> Compare for instance:

'There is a deadly monotony about the cyclic motion of the cosmos — up and down, world without end . . . soon we shall be buried under the earth, and next the earth herself shall be transformed, and then whatever has arisen out of her transformation will undergo the same process again and again to infinity'. (Marcus. *Meditations*. Bk. 9 c. 28.)

and Philo:

'The divine plan ('logos') which is commonly called Chance makes its rhythmic movement in a cyclic course'. (Philo. *Quod Deus Immutabilis*.)

And Holy Scripture might seem to say something similar:

'The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun' (*Ecclesiastes* 1, 9.)

But though there is great similarity in language between the pagan philosophers and the Jewish sages, there is this difference: that in the latter the Personality of God underlies all and the free, moral action of men is retained. In the conclusion of this passage the mind of Ecclesiastes is made up upon the knotty problem of the apparently futile cyclic change ever repeating itself, which is all that

<sup>4</sup> Cf. A. J. Toynbee, *Study of History*, vol. 4, p. 28.

Cf. P. Lagrange, *Revue Biblique*, 1923.



human wisdom can unaided see in man's history. He sums up this despairing view and concludes (ch. I, vv. 24-26):

Is it not better to eat and drink and to show his soul good things of his labours?

And this is from the hand of God (meaning that this is not fate but within the providence of God). God hath given to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom and knowledge and joy. (*Ecclesiastes* 4, 24-26.)

Where the writer clearly shows that true wisdom in this earth is not in knowledge alone but in right living, or good use of free will. So, after all, in *Ecclesiastes* we have a thought completely alien to the fatalism and determinism of the pagan outside world. He saw Wisdom as God's wisdom, guiding even when we do not understand, and also rewarding the good. Thus the 'logos' becomes not the Chance of Philo, but God himself, and, as the clouds lift and the sun of justice appears, this Wisdom is seen to be a distinct Person within the unity of the Godhead.

St John, then, is saying to his converts, 'You have this idea of wisdom or reason or rule or fate or order or logic in the world, but this is really distinct from the world. The world's order is only a reflection of a greater order and wisdom, which caused it: namely the wisdom of God. This wisdom or idea in God, this 'logos' IS GOD, was with him at the beginning before the world was; he made the world; and now at the end of the ages, he has come into this world in the form of a man, the Wisdom of God was made flesh; he, as it were, broke through the fatality you imagined. Fatality does not exist, Chance does not exist, but God's free wisdom does; here he is among us, and in us, Man and God'.

The problem for St John in regard to the Jews was not how to give them the idea of God. That was his problem with the average Greek—we speak not of the rare Aristotles and Platos. His Jewish problem was: how to present the true duality in the unity of the jealous God. The name of Son of God was freely used by Christ himself, he explained how he had come from the Father. This might lead either to the idea that the Son was only a demi-urge, or that there were two separate even if equal Gods. The nearest approach to a duality in unity that we know is the mind and its thought. The emanation of the mind is in the mind, is the mind thinking. Thus God's thought or logos is himself. In human thought there is a subordination, but in God where there can be no division of nature, no parts, what St Thomas calls 'conceptum intellectus',<sup>5</sup> must be God and equal to God. Complete this by the doctrine of the love that springs from the knowledge and we have given us by sacred Scripture a wonderful insight

<sup>5</sup> *Summa Theol.* I, 24, 1; or see the second article, 'emanatio intellectus'.

into the doctrine of the Trinity.

The Jewish writers had for more than a century been stressing the idea of God's wisdom or knowledge, as it were preparing the way for this greatest revelation that this very wisdom was distinct in Person from the Father who is eternally wise.

But apart from the comparison of our knowledge and the life in the Godhead, we maintain that there is real analogy. It is not like saying, perhaps, that a man is like a rock, he is firm in spirit as the rock is materially; there really is knowledge in God. God is truth, Christ is 'the Truth'; and God is Love. 'Deus Caritas est'. Such activities are the highest life we know, we can recognise the limitations of our form of them, and imagine more perfect forms. But God's possession of them must out-bound any dream of perfection we could conceive: yet he must possess this perfection. If we know, then God knows; if we love, then God loves. God is a spirit, and the life of the spirit is the light of truth and the flame of love. Thus 'logos' is no arbitrary title but a proper one of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity.

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In English the first sentences of St John's Gospel give us only a faint idea of the depth of meaning in the Greek, the 'Word' having far less in it than 'logos'. Perhaps the word 'Wisdom' is our nearest equivalent. Thus, 'In the beginning was Wisdom and Wisdom was with God and Wisdom was God'. But even here there is danger of losing the point that Wisdom is a distinct person; and we have to admit that English is for once defeated to find a fitting word for him who is the Word, the 'logos'.

## THE NEW LIGHT

BY

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.



RICHARD ROLLE has been called 'The Father of English Mysticism' and it is to him we turn for the first introduction to mysticism in its strict sense among English writers. He was born some hundred years after the *Ancren Riwe* was written, and yet he is historically the first of the group of English mystics who experienced and wrote about the higher degrees of mystical prayer. Perhaps the greatest era of English sanctity had already passed when he was born in the last decade of the 13th century. There had been a succession of men and women from the time of Venerable Bede who had been led by the Spirit of God to transports of divine love and wisdom. But they had not been reflective in the way that the men of the 14th century were reflective so that the description of their lives does not enlighten later generations as to the nature of their prayer or their manner of reaching high degrees of contemplation. Rolle, amidst a profusion of Latin and English writings, did proclaim these hidden experiences, and his message was received with enthusiasm.

Geographically Rolle represents the most northerly point of the mystic path which seems to have run from Eckhart's Germany to the Low countries, across the North Sea to East Anglia and so up to Yorkshire where Richard was born near Pickering just before 1300. Some have suggested that the trade route of the Yorkshire wool which crossed to the lower Germanies was responsible for opening the avenues of thought to the mystical teaching of Eckhart's disciples. This may well be so, for the spiritual seldom works entirely independently of the material, and it is not unlikely that Richard's father held some humble post in the important export business. Rolle himself ran away from Oxford to become a hermit before he was twenty, and there is no clear indication that he received at first any other influences for a mystical life than an uncompleted ecclesiastical education with a reaction thereto, as well as a devout and poetical nature. But after spending some years as a hermit he completed his studies in Paris and there, apparently, first attained to real mystical heights of prayer. Of the period after that when he was back in Yorkshire Miss Hope Emily Allen has written: 'He then lived where he might have met anyone, from the king down, have had access to any book



written, and learned of any movement stirring in the Church'.<sup>1</sup> And whatever may have been the influence on him, this situation in spite of his retired life gave him a wide audience in that part of the world. His experiences were dramatic and his language poetic and full of romantic metaphor so that he soon had disciples, both men and women, and was exercising sway over most of the spiritual writing of the period. It was inevitable that with such popularity the greater number should have mistaken his teaching and seized on the romance without understanding the meaning symbolised by the metaphor, so that after a while a Carthusian came to declare that he had known more men to be ruined by Rolle's writings than to have profited. The author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* takes these false followers to task as well: 'Oftimes the devil feigneth quaint sounds in their ears, quaint lights and shining in their eyes, and wonderful smells in their noses: and all is but a falsehood' (c. 5), and Walter Hilton has to caution his readers about such lights and 'feelings of comfortable heat and great sweetness' (*Scale*, p. 2, c. 29). Both these refer to a too literal understanding and copying of Rolle's special experiences. No one, however, has doubted the authenticity of Rolle's own mystical enlightenment and the accuracy of his interpretation thereof, and his effect stretched beyond the purely religious sphere of prayer and contemplation to that of English poetry.

It is his genuine mystical experience coupled with his emotional way of expressing that experience which suggests him as a model of the illuminative way. There is little emphasis on the hardships of purgation. An ascetic he undoubtedly was; but his writings in general speak of the joy of love rather than of the pains of penance, they certainly are not concerned very much with the purgative way. From the first he refers to himself as the 'sitter', because he had chosen that posture as the most conducive to contemplation as well as the most comfortable. Yet we could not easily class him among the higher ranks of those who have largely experienced the joy of perfect union in the unitive way. However diligently we may apply the interpretation of metaphor and analogy, his constant insistence on the heat of love in his breast as being also a physical thing limits the scope of the love: he cannot have borne the full impact of the *Todo y Nada* of St John of the Cross.

We refer here, of course, more to writings than to his own personal life. He was regarded by many after his death as a saint and an Office was composed for the celebration of his feast. He may therefore have reached the intimacies of union which mark the final stages of sanctification. But from what has come down to us of his own life he seems

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<sup>1</sup> *English Writings of Richard Rolle*. Introduction, p. xxiii.

to have spent most of his years, which were untimely in their ending, in that somewhat uncertain and fluctuating time of the spiritual life called by many the Illuminative Way and by St Thomas the age of the *Proficient*—a term which conveys movement and development rather than a quiet rest. He seems to have passed comparatively quickly from the first age of the spiritual life to this second period of new light. In a celebrated chapter of the *Incendium Amoris* he describes how he came to the burning fire of love:

‘Three years, except three or four months, were run from the beginning of the change of my life and of my mind, to the opening of the heavenly door: so that the Face being shown, the eyes of the heart might behold and see by what way they might seek my Love, and unto him continually desire. The door forsooth yet biding open, nearly a year passed until the time in which the heat of everlasting love was verily felt in my heart.<sup>2</sup> (c. 15.)

Certainly he regarded himself as having attained practically the highest degree in the spiritual life, for later in the same chapter he speaks of ‘the high degree of Christ’s love’ which had been granted him, and concludes that the soul ‘ascends not into another degree, but, as it were, confirmed in grace, as far as mortal man can, she rests’. That was his own opinion, but there is evidence to suggest that after he had received this special mystical gift he retained a good number of blemishes. Perhaps they were part of the bluff truculence of the Yorkshireman; he was somewhat resentful of opposition and inclined towards pride in his own graces. Apparently referring to his own special way of life he admonishes those who smile at it and regard it as uncanonical by asking: ‘How do they dare to rebuke him whom rather they should honour as patron?’ (*Contra Amatores Mundi*). In his early writings he had challenged without sufficient humility—however right he may have been—the authorities of the Church and the spiritual state of many of the clergy. The effect of this lack of maturity led inevitably to persecution from diocesan officials as well as his own friends who had at first welcomed him hospitably. And so gradually towards the end of his life his writings show a greater peace of mind and growing maturity which suggest that he is in fact reaching some further stage of union in love of God. It is mysterious that God’s sudden mystical graces should leave the soul so much work to be done in adjusting her personal moral virtues to the situation. But it is a fact that many imperfections remain after these high passive graces have been bestowed. St Teresa herself was puzzled by this incongruity and put the diffi-

<sup>2</sup> All quotations from the *Incendium Amoris* are taken from Richard Misyn’s 15th-century translation edited by Miss F. M. M. Comper and published by Messrs Methuen.

culty, without resolving it, in her *Life*: 'How is it, when the Lord begins to grant a soul such sublime favours as that of bringing it to perfect contemplation, that it does not, as by rights it should, become perfect all at once? . . . How is it that it is only later, as time goes on, that the same Lord leaves it perfect in the virtues?' (c. 22. Peers, i, 143).

It is therefore later in life, after considerable change of domicile, passing hither and thither in the south and west of Yorkshire, that Richard finally settles down at Hampole in a quiet state of resignation. He is no longer concerned with what others think and say about him and his tendency to pride and arrogance are finally overcome. He is removed from the 'business of bodily things' partly by his greater retirement, but more through his greater interior peace. But his apostolic activities naturally increase, in the sense that he is constantly concerned with the spiritual upbringing of many devout religious and his fame as a man of wisdom and holiness begins to spread abroad and assist in a reviving of the Christian spirit. All this is characteristic of the age of the proficient with its early mystical experience and the consequent alignment of the normal life of the virtues with these special divine gifts. So that when death came, probably through assisting others during the Black Death in Yorkshire in 1349, Richard Rolle was really stabilised in the life of union and ready for its culmination in heaven.

In following the aim of these articles by tapping the spiritual literature in the English language before the Reformation, we should strictly leave out of consideration the greater part of Richard Rolle's writings which began in Latin. And this would in some ways be desirable because his English writings all belong to the later period when he was more surely rooted in the illuminative way. And they link up easily with the previous studies on the *Ancren Riwe* because he began to write in the vernacular for the sake of devout women who were in fact leading the life outlined in that Rule. His first English work was probably *The English Psalter*, written for an anchoress named Margaret Kirkeby who came from Hampole but who after his death moved her cell further north to Anderby. Later, a year before his death, he wrote *The Form of Living* for the same anchoress. This is another instance of the influence of these holy women on the English literature of prayer and the devout life. The *Riwe* begins the tradition and Rolle continues it a century later, writing several books and many spiritual lyrics for these his spiritual daughters. After his day the tradition was firmly rooted in English life.

Rolle however was by no means tied to the English tongue and a



great deal of his work was in Latin, in particular the greatest of his works, the *Incendium Amoris*, which was probably written at the beginning of the last period of his life. It would therefore be narrow-minded to exclude from present consideration the treasures of his Latin pen which can happily elucidate and enlarge the thought behind his English works. We are in duty bound to consider all his works in so far as they apply to the way of the proficients, a policy which demands the neglect of some of Rolle's more elementary writings, which will for that very reason repay a careful reading apart from this study. Moreover two of the most important Latin works have an easily obtainable 15th century translation by Richard Misyn which helps to link us directly with the pre-Reformation tongue.

It is not easy to fix any chronology in his writings except in so far as the English are usually later than the Latin. So that we make no attempt here to follow Rolle's development as reflected in the series of his own books, letters and hymns. The method most suited to our purpose is to base ourselves on the English writings and expand their content by reference to the more celebrated of his Latin works.

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## DEVOTION TO THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY

BY

ANTHONY ROSS, O.P.



CHILD in trouble or in disgrace goes first to its mother for comfort and forgiveness. When in fear of its father's anger it hopes for its mother's help in turning anger aside. It is not surprising that after a long period of self-sufficient rationalism, in a time of widespread misery and persecution, men should begin to show a new appreciation of their own sinfulness and weakness and their dependence on God by turning first of all to our Lady, God's Mother and ours. Unlike ours, her heart has never faltered for one moment in its love of God and its love of mankind. All its desire has been for God and the showing of his glory among men. Her heart has never lacked courage or patience; it has been always what our hearts should be and are not. Thinking of it we see our own shortcoming; we see, too, a source of sympathy and help. Our Lady is the first, most perfect, fruit of Christ's redeeming work and cooperates with him in the rescue of sinners and the perfecting of his Church. To her, as refuge of sinners, millions have turned in these last hundred years or so. They have been years

whose spiritual history is largely the story of devotion to the Mother of God, and a central place in the story is taken by the growth of devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The present century has been something of a climax. The popularity of the miraculous medal, the development of the Legion of Mary, and the prominence of Fatima are all associated with this devotion. At Fatima, according to official accounts, our Lady declared in 1917 that our Lord wished devotion to her Immaculate Heart to be established throughout the world. Foretelling sufferings from war, famine, and persecutions against the Church, she continued: 'In order to stop it I shall ask for the consecration of the world to my Immaculate Heart, as well as Communion of reparation on the first Saturday of each month. If my requests are granted Russia will be converted and there will be peace. Otherwise an impious propaganda will spread its errors through the world, raising up wars and persecutions against the Church. Many will be martyred, several nations will be wiped out. The outlook is therefore gloomy. But there is a ray of hope—my Immaculate Heart will finally triumph'. Twenty-five years later the present Pope concluded the silver jubilee celebrations of the apparitions at Fatima with the consecration of the Church and the whole world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Later in the same year, 1942, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, he renewed that consecration in St Peter's; and in May, 1944, it was decreed that the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary should be kept in future by the whole Church on the 22nd of August.

It was then only a little over a hundred years since the parish priest of our Lady of Victories in Paris, tempted to despair of making any impression on the more than 25,000 lapsed Catholics in his care, heard an 'interior voice' say: 'Consecrate your parish to the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary'. After some doubt and hesitation the priest, Père Desgenettes, made the act of consecration one Sunday evening in December, 1836. It was followed by rapid improvement in the condition of the parish and by the swift spread of the Confraternity of the Immaculate Heart of Mary which Père Desgenettes founded. Later raised to the dignity of an archconfraternity, it was the principal means of spreading knowledge of the devotion in the nineteenth century; when its founder died, in 1860, it had a membership of over 20 millions. The shrine of our Lady of Victories had become a great centre of pilgrimage. Among the pilgrims was Newman, there in thanksgiving for his reception into the Church. Other Englishmen were in touch with Père Desgenettes and the confraternity from its earliest years, especially the Passionist Father Ignatius, asking for prayers for the conversion of England.

The Holy See expressed a wish that on the first Sunday of each month Mass should be offered at the shrine of our Lady of Victories for that intention, one which was dear to Père Desgenettes himself. Advocating the setting up of confraternities of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in every parish in England, he pointed out that our Lady could destroy heresy at a stroke. 'Plant then the banner of the Immaculate Heart through the length and breadth of England.'

His eagerness to see the spread of devotion to the Immaculate Heart was shared by the Holy See in his own day, particularly by Pope Pius IX, who remarked more than once that the Archconfraternity of the Immaculate Heart of Mary was the work of God and would bring many blessings on the Church. It was undoubtedly in keeping with the teaching of many great saints in the earlier centuries who were marked by devotion to the Immaculate Heart. St Mechtilde was one of the first, and her salutations to the Heart of Mary are, as it were, a summary of doctrine which was expanded by subsequent writers.

O glorious Virgin, no heart can be to us as thy heart, near to the heart of Jesus Christ.

I salute thy heart in the desire it had above all patriarchs and prophets for the birth of Christ.

I salute thy heart in its love; for through burning and most humble love thou wert the Mother of God.

I salute thy heart in the goodness and gentleness with which so tenderly thou didst nourish the little Jesus.

I salute thy heart because it kept carefully all the words he spoke.

I salute thy heart, reflecting the picture of Christ in his Passion.

I salute thy heart in its unceasing prayers and solicitude for the Church.

I salute thy heart which daily in heaven makes perfect our petitions before the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, advocating our cause.<sup>1</sup>

She goes on to recall the purity, patience, humility, and the other virtues of our Lady's heart, and to pray that with our Lady's help her own heart may always be similarly disposed, united with it in the service of Christ, in true union with the divine will. That insistence on union with God as the end to which the love of Mary leads us is the centre of the doctrine of devotion to the Immaculate Heart. It is to bring men back to her Son and to their duty of living for God's glory that our Lady intervenes in the course of history. Hence the

<sup>1</sup> From *The True Prayers of St Gertrude and St Mechtilde*; translated by the Rev. John Gray. Sheed and Ward. (2nd edition, 1938, p. 83.)



appreciation of devotion to her Immaculate Heart which appears in St Bernardine of Siena, in St Francis of Sales, St Margaret Mary Alacoque, and above all in St John Eudes. With them must be associated the recently canonised Dominican tertiary, St Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort. The list might be extended, and with it the record of papal encouragement of the devotion as a means of bringing the world to God and healing the ills of our own time.

It is something to which we cannot remain indifferent, especially in view of the guidance recently given by the Holy See. There is no difficulty about becoming informed about the history and doctrine involved, since the publication of Fr O'Carroll's book, *Consecration to the Immaculate Heart*.<sup>2</sup> There, in plain unemotional prose in which only rarely does the choice of words sound slightly odd, the nature of devotion to the Immaculate Heart is explained clearly and concisely. The reader is shown where to go for a fuller theological treatment of the subject, but many will find Fr O'Carroll's work sufficient in itself and a convincing plea that they consecrate their lives to the service of Mary, looking towards her as little children usually do to their mothers; or, to vary the figure, placing themselves under her banner in order to hasten the coming of her Son's kingdom 'in our own hearts and in those of all men, in our country and in all the world, as in heaven, so on earth'.

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<sup>2</sup> *Consecration to the Immaculate Heart*; by Patrick O'Carroll, C.S.Sp. Mercier Press, 2s. 6d.

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## CARDS FOR CHRISTMAS

One of the strange relics of Christianity which survives the onslaught of paganism is the habit of sending cards at Christmas. Literally millions of people who know nothing of the incarnation, who have never said a prayer to our Lady, who regard the shepherds and kings (if they have heard of them) as fables, send cards to their acquaintances at this season. But their cards are usually meaningless snow, holly, robins or plum-puddings. Catholics certainly should try to recapture this relic and make it Christian once more. They at least can send cards which will remind their friends—particularly their non-Catholic friends—that Christmas is the Mass of Christ, the birthday of our Lord. They can have their needs in this matter supplied by writing for Christian Christmas Cards to C.A.G.O., 22 Bramham Gardens, S.W.5, and to Edward R. Westbrook, 11 Dorset Road South, Bexhill, Sussex.

## SPIRITUAL HOMILIES

BY

MACARIUS OF EGYPT

*(Translated by H. C. GRAEF)*

THE CHILDREN OF THE WORLD AND THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT (HOM. 5)



HE prince of the world holds all men captive by earthly things, which he uses to agitate and frighten them. He causes them to stumble through vain thoughts, shameful desires and worldly ties, with which he ever allures and captivates all the sinful race of Adam. For the word that the Creator spoke to Cain: 'A fugitive and vagabond shalt thou be upon the earth', has become the type and image of all sinners. After the Fall, Adam's race bore this image within: they were perpetually agitated by imaginations, fears, and all sorts of perturbations, desires and lusts. For the prince of this world tosses about every soul that is not born of God. For as out of the one Adam the whole human race spread over the earth, so the one evil of the passions has submerged this whole sinful race, so that the prince of evil can easily sift every one of them through their material, vain and exciting imaginations.

Now true Christians differ from all other men in this, that their mind is always occupied with heavenly thoughts, and that they contemplate the good things that are eternal, because they are partakers of the Holy Ghost. For they are born of God from above, and truly accounted worthy to be God's children. Therefore they reach a stable state of tranquillity and peace—not, it is true, without long struggle and much labour—until they are no longer sifted and tossed about in the fluctuations of their vain imaginings. In this respect they are greater and better than the world, that their minds and thoughts are established in the peace of Christ and the charity of the Holy Ghost. For the Christians differ from other men not so much by external forms, but in their spiritual renewal and peace of soul, in the charity of the Lord and heavenly love—in these does the new creature of the Christian differ from all other men in the world. For their joy, their beauty and their heavenly riches are ineffable; and though these have to be won with pain and sweat, in temptation and struggle, they are wholly given by the grace of God.

ON DETACHMENT (HOM. 5)

Those who long for the love of the heavenly King, and in their desire have only him before their eyes, will with his assistance

become detached from all love of the world; they will forsake all earthly ties, so that their heart may desire him alone and nothing else besides him.

Now there are but few who, after a good beginning, attain to a good end, and persevere without falling back in their unique love for God alone, being detached from all things. For many are stirred up at first and given a share in heavenly grace, being wounded by celestial love. But because of the intervening struggles, sufferings and temptations of the evil one they do not persevere. They are agitated by all sorts of worldly desires, because every one wants to love something of this world. Thus, because they are not perfectly detached from its love, they remain submerged in its depth through the cowardly weakness of their will in the face of this earthly attachment. For whether the tie that holds a man to the world be small or great, it does hold him down and will not allow him to rise. For it is clear that a man loves the passion against which he will not fight sincerely, and that it dominates him and weighs him down. It becomes a snare and a fetter to him, so that his mind does not tend towards God nor seeks to please and serve him alone, to win the kingdom of eternal life.

For the soul whose desire is truly the Lord turns her love wholly to him and thus obtains the help of his grace. She denies herself and does not follow her own desires, but detaches herself as far as possible from every visible tie, gives herself wholly to the Lord, and so passes happily through struggles, pains and afflictions. For where one's love is, from there one receives help and the weight of attraction. If a man loves something of the world, that thing will become a burden to him, pull him down and prevent him from raising himself to God. But if one loves God and his commandments, one will receive help and relief from him, and all his precepts will become easy.

#### ON HOW TO PRAY (HOM. 33)

We ought not to require a particular posture for prayer, nor clamour, or silence, or bent knees, but should simply direct our mind to await the Lord, so that when he comes he may enter into the soul through all her gates and paths and the organs of sense. Therefore one should sometimes be silent and at other times pray with crying, only the mind should always be firmly fixed in God. For just as the body, when it does some work, is wholly occupied with it and helped by all its members, so also must the soul be concentrated on prayer and the love of the Lord; she must not be distracted and let her thoughts go astray, but should fix her attention on Christ alone.

Take a merchant for an example. He does not think only of one



way of making money, but is anxious to increase his fortune by every possible means, trying now one idea, now another, changing from what brings no profit to a more lucrative article. So also should we skilfully prepare our souls by various methods, that we may obtain the greatest gain, God himself, who will teach us to pray in truth. Then will the Lord rest in the soul that is of good will, and make her the throne of his glory where he reposes. And as the house, when the master is there, is richly and beautifully adorned, so also is the soul in whom the Master abides full of beauty and dignity, for the Lord is dwelling in her with all his spiritual treasures.

#### THE BRIDE SOUL (HOM. 49)

Oh ineffable mercy of God, who gives himself to those who believe! For soon he will be their inheritance, and will dwell in a man's body as in a beautiful house. For as he has created heaven and earth as a dwelling place for man, so also did he create the human body and soul as a habitation for himself. He reposes in the body as in his own house, and has the loving soul, made in his image, for his beautiful bride. Neither the wise by their wisdom nor the prudent by their prudence can comprehend the delicate essence of the soul, nor say what she is, unless the Holy Ghost reveal it.

Now therefore contemplate, distinguish and grasp this matter. He is God, she is not God; he is the Lord, she is a servant; he is the Creator, she the creature; he the Maker, she what is made. There is nothing in common between his nature and hers. But because of his infinite, ineffable and incomprehensible love and mercy, it has pleased him to dwell in this rational creature, this precious and chosen one, as the Scripture says: 'that we might be some beginning of his creature', that is to say that we should have communion with his wisdom, being his habitation and his own pure bride.

With such good things, such promises, such divine loving-kindness before our eyes, let us then not hesitate, my children, to press on towards eternal life, and to devote ourselves entirely to what is pleasing to God. Therefore let us beseech him by the power of his divinity to free us from the dark prison of vile passions, and to cause his own image to shine forth in us, restoring the soul to wholeness and purity. Thus may we be accounted worthy of the communion of the Spirit, glorifying the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, for ever and ever. Amen.

## THE SPIRITUALITY OF ST. PHILIP NERI

BY

F. VINCENT READE, Cong. Or.



HE who undertakes to write upon the spirituality of St. Philip Neri is by his very task pledged to avoid ponderosity, yet the writer of these few lines does not know how to escape the need for some kind of introduction to his remarks. The need arises, not from the nature of his subject but from the fact of the appearance of his essay in a periodical devoted expressly to 'spirituality'. For we who here write could not be comfortable in saying what we want to say and propose to say unless first we made clear that throughout we shall have in mind two presuppositions. The former of these is that the very function of a journal of spirituality is to present to its readers *in toto* all the various ramifications and different types of Christian sanctity and ascetic which are approved by the Church, in order that its readers may discover, learn, assimilate, or on the other hand set aside what they find, according to their own needs, circumstances and spiritual trend—the corollary of which is that we ourselves are allowed to speak as we feel, and are to be excused if occasionally we seem to be overpraising the special spirit of our own saint and thus indirectly depreciating other spirits and other saints; than which nothing could be further from our mind and intention, just as nothing could be further from what was in his lifetime the attitude of Philip himself. Our other presupposition is that in a brief disquisition upon the spirituality (whether as exhibited in action or as embodied in teaching) of any given saint emphasis must fall precisely upon that in him which differs from what we find in other saints rather than upon that which is common to all. Much therefore will here be passed over which is intrinsically important and even crucial from the point of view of sanctity, and which we may be sure was brought out to the full in the process of canonisation, wherein the opposite course to our own must necessarily have been pursued, since there the matter in hand was precisely to prove that Philip Neri had displayed in his life the very same characteristics which are found in all the other heroes and heroines of sanctity whom the Church has raised to her altars. And surely this very fact as to the 'process' justifies us in proceeding here and now along the other path? For if the Church has officially guaranteed that Philip exhibited in his life the whole complexus of transcendent qualities which form the hallmark of a

saint, why should we, out of our nothingness, tediously and meticulously affirm the very same thing?

St Philip moreover pre-eminently belongs to no ascetic type; if ever a saint was *sui generis*, surely it is he. True, every saint, if only we knew enough about him or her, must have been notably individual and entirely himself or herself; and the nearer we get to any of these extraordinary personages the more clearly do we see that all of them were psychological solitaries. Nevertheless, types of sanctity there have been in such sense that we can correctly speak of, for example, saints of the desert, hermits, pillar saints, abbots, missionaries, founders of religious orders, reformers of ecclesiastical life, and so forth; and it almost necessarily follows that individuals in any of these groups will have certain marked features in common. Philip however was none of these things, and we cannot find any group in which he can be placed. It is true that he was called the 'Apostle of Rome'. It is true that he brought about, or contributed largely to a marvellous reform of Roman society and of the court of Rome, and in his later life actually influenced the public policy of popes—though only, it would seem, of popes who had been under his influence previously to their elevation to the papal throne. Yet he set out to do none of these things, and even while he was doing them he seemed unconscious of the fact. Similarly, if he was the founder of a religious congregation, that came about almost by accident and without planning on his own part. All these works in very truth were but the effluence of his own personal life and the resultant of casual personal contacts with other men. The Congregation of the Oratory itself indeed was and is nothing else than a kind of extension of the personality and personal work of St Philip himself, embodying his unconventionality and independence, scheduled for no particular work except that of ministering to the souls who in the surge of life come within its ambit, its sons unperipatetic and 'always there', just as was their Father and Founder, who would never leave Rome.

What, however, was 'special' in St Philip, besides his being a saint and a secular priest? What makes him so striking a figure in the annals of the Church, as he is almost universally allowed to be? What, in fact, is the 'spirituality' of St Philip Neri, that problem or phenomenon with which the title of our present essay compels us to deal? We can but endeavour, according to our capacity, to visualise and throw into relief some traits and trends of the character and teaching of this elusive saint, who spoke so little, who preferred to live in obscurity and to be laughed at, who nevertheless has attracted the admiration of geniuses, and whose feast was for two centuries a day of obligation in the city of the popes.



In the first place, then, let us say that nothing was more characteristic of this untheoretical yet (because really a saint) divinely-guided simple priest than his consistently maintained attitude towards all humanity of universal geniality and hopefulness—tempered, however, though in no sense detracted from, by a humorous touch of kindly cynicism. No world of fixed moral and spiritual classes was before the eyes of our saint; no men were wholly good and none were wholly bad—and especially was this true of the young. Far from the truth, in the view (not consciously thought out, perhaps) of Philip, was the division of mankind into the elect and the reprobate, with the former as a spiritually perfect minority pursuing its anxious way through a wicked world from which the elect must at all costs keep themselves uncontaminated and separate. No—all men were convertible; none reprobate; none irretrievably fixed in malice. And on the other hand, when youths were praised for their virtue and piety, he would say : 'Yes, but wait till they are fledged and then see what kind of a flight they will make'. He was unready to canonise any before their death, or to blind himself to the shortcomings even of those eminent in the Church or in general esteem—yet only because to him all men were human, and all shortcomings pardonable. Philip, we may say, jumped a whole era in the history of the Church, an era—beginning perhaps in the 14th century and not running out its course till the verge of the 19th century (with the final extinction of Jansenism)—an era when men's minds tended to be darkened by a dismal and distorted view concerning 'election' and 'predestination', by a cloud which was dispelled in the long run by the devotion of the Sacred Heart. But the saint at whom we are now looking stands outside the whole of this phase of feeling; taking us back even to the joyful supernaturalism of the Apostolic Age and leading us on to the age of Lacordaire and Ozanam, of St Joseph Cottolengo and St John Bosco, yet remaining ever himself with a supernaturality entirely his own, pre-eminent and unique. In looking at Philip and his life we seem also to forget the fierceness of the Protestant controversies which belong to the days in which he lived (though he knew of them so well); we forget the marring of catholic thought and feeling to which those controversies gave rise; we forget the gloom of the Spanish Inquisition and the terrors of the pontificate of Paul IV (though our saint was himself not unaffected by it); we forget the domestic quarrels between 'religions' within the Church, for Philip was friend and supporter of all of them. And surely in the easy and speedy canonisation of this Florentine saint who dwelt perpetually in Rome the Church set her seal upon geniality and cheerfulness, and in so doing canonised, we might almost say, the spirit of

Florence and of local Rome; for when was Florence uncheerful, or Christian Rome unurbane?

Completely in harmony with this general serenity of spirit and tolerance of mind in St Philip Neri were two notable and persistent features in his guidance of others, whether laymen or priests. The former of these was a principle which contrary to his custom he embodied in a constantly used phrase: 'For changing from a bad state to a good state no thought or hesitation is called for; but for changing from a good state to a better one it is otherwise, and much consideration is needed'. And in general he preferred that when men received the divine call to higher spirituality they should not change their state of life but should endeavour to serve God better in the state in which they found themselves. Hence, though Philip sent many of his penitents into Religious Orders, yet he is on the whole the saint of the layman and of the secular priest. The second of these characteristics, and it seems to belong to our saint pre-eminently and almost uniquely, was one which we will venture to specify by using a homely English phrase: he was consistently anxious that good people, and especially his own disciples (above all perhaps his priest sons) should not 'take themselves too seriously'. This latter principle Philip of course applied vigorously to himself, and though in his biographies we find the resultant treated mainly as humility (and therefore somewhat conventionalised) it was in reality something wider and deeper than that. Humility it was, but something more, at once a marvellous sublimation and a strident proclamation of that virtue, rendering it practically understandable to the many, crying aloud its transcendent importance. Here is a notable instance of what one of Philip's early priest-disciples describes as the saint's *domestication* of Christian virtue; and it was moreover an offshoot of a distrust and dislike of the highflown and sensational in religious devotion which we find as a constant, yet with many ramifications throughout the life of our saint. Thus he distrusted visions and visionaries; and once when one of his sons was enlarging eloquently in a sermon upon the gloriousness of suffering for Christ, the saint first noisily interrupted the preaching, and then, mounting the pulpit himself, proclaimed that so far as the members of his own Congregation were concerned (the preacher himself being by implication included) their priesthood up to that time had brought them not suffering and contempt but honour and esteem.

Nevertheless, this homely, humorous, informal saint was a superlatively supernatural personage; the roots, the sources, the springs of all his actions were in the unseen world; through his very eccentricities and comicalities the light of heaven never fails to shine; the

older biographers are here in the right. And at this point we cannot refrain from entering a *caveat* as to some modern hagiography. We ourselves have no great devotion to the conventional pious biographies (with their lamentable tendency to turn saints into nine-pins), but some modern writers, with the best possible intentions, seem to us to be not very happy in their efforts to arrive at something better. The life of a saint should by all means be truthful, sober, critical, genuinely historical, but the pity is that some rightly-intentioned and well-equipped authors have fallen into one or both of two fatal errors. One of these is to assume too readily that to be 'critical' is to eliminate as far as possible the supernatural. The other is to suppose that a saint cannot be helpful to us unless he is so humanised as to be after all very much like other people. Both of these errors have a basis of truth, but it is truth distorted, and so distorted as to become in a deep sense untruth, and a kind of untruth which tends to depress the level of Christian and catholic life by depriving that life of idealism and inspiration. Then, as to the subject of our present disquisition, a non-supernatural and rather 'ordinary' Philip Neri is to our mind not a historical figure, not any more than would be a non-supernatural Paul of Tarsus or John the Beloved Disciple. The earliest and most reliable biographies of our saint depict for us a life so immersed in the world of supernal forces that particular miracles (not in our view the most important part of the supernaturalism of sanctity) seem but the natural and almost inevitable outflow of a life that is in its whole substance above the natural. What we find in Philip is that though he lived in the turmoil of what was then the most cosmopolitan and most highly civilised city in the world, though the whole tide of life surged round him and he did not shrink from it, though even to the very end of his life he entertained a constant stream of visitors in his room, maintained a variety of social contacts and was not untouched by the public events of the whole continent of Europe (and indeed of the New World), yet he never ceased to live in the atmosphere of mystical prayer and sank deeper into that atmosphere by a kind of inevitable gravitation whenever he was left free and alone, whenever there was not at his side some soul of man which he could help by his smiles and caressing words. As his life went on this absorption in prayer increased, and during the final few years of that long and active life his daily Mass took three hours or more to accomplish owing to the intensity of a devotion which at last refused to be restrained. Philip Neri, it would seem, lived wholly and entirely in the two worlds to which we all of us in some sense belong, the seen and the unseen. He united in himself those two worlds and made them into one. It is said of a certain kind of people



(very delightful people, surely) that they 'bring out all the good that is in others'; and it might be said truly of Philip that he did more; he brought out all the good that was in the world, in that world which we see and feel all around us, the whole motley and complex pageant of the life of man. Yet Philip himself was all the while living also in another world, hidden with Christ in God.

Perfectly in harmony with this duality in the saint's own life was his way of dealing with the souls who submitted themselves to his influence, a way, let us observe, that was spontaneous and animated by instinctive sympathy rather than proceeding upon any thought-out system or method (Philip did not know that dismal word psychology). For while his unceasing endeavour was to lead men far in the road of spirituality and good works, yet he avoided asking of them more than they could bear. He took men as and where he found them and led them step by step, rarely advising (as we have noted above) any sudden and drastic change in their mode of life. He may perhaps have had in mind a half-conscious thought of sanctifying thus the whole world of men in all its aspects and phases, but it also seems that, ever in contact with the whole general efflorescence of the life of man in the world, he loved in that life all that was genuinely natural, and tolerated much that he could not wholly love. He wished every department of human life to be sanctified. He feared causing average people to throw up the sponge by laying heavy burdens upon them; yet may we not also say that he so loved each human individual as to be unwilling to turn him into something that he really was not? Upon all, it is true, he imposed cheerfulness and humility, but even in respect of this last-named virtue, which Philip prized above all other virtues, our saint used great discretion. Not all of his penitents were ordered to carry large dogs or pots and pans through the crowded streets, or to deliver loud-voiced, preposterous messages in the shops. And here we arrive at the other facet of Philip's direction of souls. Never was he content with a low level of final attainment; far from his mentality was it to be satisfied with a lay catholic life which was in the main purely natural, but just punctuated by sporadic religious duties—a mechanical performance of set prayers, Mass on days of obligation and occasional approach to sacraments. On the contrary, he seems ever to assume that each true christian is (according to his capacity) in personal touch with God through Christ; that all should expect answers to genuine prayer, and should look for supernatural results in the use of sacraments. He seems to have held that all men were capable of mental prayer, or at any rate that such prayer was in no way inconsistent with ordinary life in the world. The basic spiritual aids provided in and

enjoined by the Church and open to all—prayer, the word of God, the sacraments: these, in Philip's view, are sufficient to lead souls to the spiritual heights; and from their rightful usage it is impossible to expect too much.

In the light of these observations we hope to be acquitted of extravagance if we suggest that if St Philip Neri may be rightly called the saint for the ordinary man, he may also be regarded as in a special way the inspiration of the 'mere' priest, by which we mean the priest as priest; the one who has taken no vows, possesses no jurisdiction, has no official cure of souls, is not detailed for any specific work; the one whose business in life is just to pray, to preach to the ordinary run of the faithful, to offer the holy sacrifice, to hear the confessions of and give holy communion to the mixed and perhaps rather undistinguished crowd. The life and work of Philip (who only in his later life was sought out by persons of celebrity and distinction) proclaims to such that their own life and work may be sublime, and that no spiritual heights are denied to them. As we have said above the underlying idea of the Congregation which Philip founded (or, we would rather say, which grew up around him) is that of a body of 'mere' priests, of priests who see no higher vocation than that of fulfilling as perfectly as possible the duties of the priest as priest.<sup>1</sup>

Perfectly in harmony with this unvarying trend or trait in St Philip do we find certain more detailed features in his practice and precept, one or two of which have already been mentioned. No doubt it was partly because our saint himself was called by God to guide not lonely and exceptional souls but the whole generality of mankind, no doubt, we say, it arose from his own vocation, but Philip's dislike and distrust of visions and visionaries was extreme, and the disquiet and discomfort which he experienced in connection with a Sister Orsola Benincasa makes curious but most interesting reading. He believed that the servants of God received personal inspiration and direction but he greatly feared delusion, hated the *bizarre* in religion, and vastly preferred the ordinary and safe ways, virtue and good works, prayer and duty.

He was much opposed to the multiplication of devotional practices; and in his own Congregation, as it began to take shape, he reduced these to a minimum. Here the saint, as he himself has told us, had partly in mind the obvious dangers of boredom, lassitude, mechanicalness and lack of perseverance followed by reaction into the other extreme; here again we find testimony to his ever-present unwillingness to lay burdens upon poor human nature—but also, we

<sup>1</sup> True, were we writing upon the Congregation of the Oratory as such, there would be things to add; and what is said here must be referred to its context.

think, a contributing motive in this line of direction was that he who himself lived easily so much in the unseen, who cultivated in himself so close a personal intercourse with God and the divine-human Saviour, wished for all whom he was called upon to influence a similar freedom of spirit, a like simple dealing with God, unhampered by a network of set prayers or regimentation of interior life. And in regard to the priests of his Congregation he had also in view, no doubt, the preservation of a personal freedom from ties which was indispensable for those who were to be perpetually available for the aid of souls drifting in the surge of life.

Penultimately, however, for at the full close of this presentation of a saint concerning whom much is known and much has been written, we have a final characterisation of our own to hazard—we feel bound to deal a little more fully with the humorousness for which Philip is so famous in the realm of hagiography. For in modern times, and among well-meaning admirers, there has been a tendency to write with exaggeration and at random on this subject. Some twenty years ago there appeared an outstanding and epoch-making book, *St Philip Neri and the Roman Society of his Times*, by two French priests (not Oratorians,) which was reviewed by the eminent Henri Bremond<sup>2</sup> in an essay entitled *The Patron Saint of the Humorists*. The supreme merit of Ponnelle and Bordet lies in their historical research, their many-sidedness and their love of truth—and may many lives of saints be written on their model; but M. Bremond thinks that the joint authors minimised the peculiarity of Philip which we are considering because they themselves were lacking in the sense of humour. The older biographies, as we have seen, conventionalised the trait for the sake of edification. We cannot in this short essay discuss the opinions of all the different writers, but in some of the less eminent and even more recent than those just mentioned, we have read words which we have thought unconsidered and shallow.<sup>3</sup> The truth of the matter we take to be, though we are far from making claim to have sounded all the depths, that Philip's gaiety and humorousness were neither merely a native endowment nor purely an adopted line of conduct, were neither wholly natural nor wholly supernatural. The two French writers have reason on their side in connecting this trait with the saint's Florentine birth; and the older biographers are not entirely beside the mark when they ascribe his jokes to humility—whether as exhibited in himself or as promoted in others. We ourselves suggest that there was native to Philip a natural gaiety of

<sup>2</sup> *Divertissements devant l'Arche*.

<sup>3</sup> Goethe's dealing with the matter, in his celebrated characterisation of St Philip, is by no means inapt.



temperament and a vein of fantastic humour which everything that was supernatural in him approved and valued, which, while sublimating, he cultivated, and which he at times deliberately permitted to run into extravagances in order to lower men's estimate of himself or to take the nonsense out of others. Allied to, but not identical with this, was an easy cheerfulness and serenity which was natural to him, not 'produced' for the sake of edification (though to do that might in another saint be the work of heroic virtue) and still less affected; an endowment which he marvellously preserved throughout and till the very end of a life which was almost coterminous with the bewildering, terrible, tragic 16th century, no developments of which, nevertheless, were unknown to or unobserved by this inconspicuous director of souls. To use the word 'buffoonery' in connection with Philip is beside the mark as well as being scandalous; but there is also an almost libellous falsity in presenting him merely as a model for pious people who need to be rescued from a natural gloom.

And now in conclusion: A son of St Philip, writing from the home of Newman, asks to be excused if he ventures to single out as the most specific mark of his patriarch a quality which he knows not how otherwise to define than by the word *reality*, that word being used in its peculiarly English sense.<sup>4</sup> The difficulty which arises from attaching this word specifically to our own saint is of course that all true saints are 'real', are genuine, simple, sincere. Yet after making this reserve we will endeavour to justify ourselves by restriction and illustration. Both Newman and Philip, each in his own way, (and in many of their ways they were so different) not only repudiated any pretence of superior sanctity as existing in themselves, but so conjoined in themselves and in their teaching the natural and the supernatural as to place themselves easily beside the average man, thus rendering high supernaturality homely and tangible, and demonstrating that the human limitation and frailty which the average man feels so keenly in himself is not inconsistent with veritable life in God. The great son of St Philip whose name we have momentarily brought in is not here our subject, but as to the saint himself we would direct attention to the wonderful, almost disconcerting, yet to our mind utterly lovable ejaculations which he himself commonly used and which he recommended to others for their own use. It is almost dangerous to detach any few of these sayings from among the rest (like the notoriously deceptive detaching of quotations from their context), but as the whole collection of them cannot at the moment be before the eyes of the readers of our paragraphs we are compelled to take this risk; and in accordance with the theme of our little essay

<sup>4</sup> A combination, we should say, of realism (as generally understood) and sincerity.

we select from among them those which seem to throw the most light upon the saint's own mentality and the general trend of his direction of souls. Let us ponder seriously the radical significance of the following seven of them.

My Jesus, I would fain love thee.

My Jesus, do not trust me.

I have told thee that I do not know thee.

I seek thee and I do not find thee; come to me, my Jesus.

I have never loved thee, and I wish to love thee, my Jesus.

I would fain serve thee, my Jesus, and I do not know how.

I would fain find thee, my Jesus, and I do not know the way.

Is it possible, we are inclined to say, that a glorious saint of God should utter such words out of his own heart and as expressive of himself? Were they not intended merely for use by beginners or stumblers in the spiritual life? Yet the testimony of the saint's disciples seems to indicate conclusively that these ejaculations were first constantly in the saint's own mouth before he passed them on as good current coin to his penitents. Certainly they raise deep questions; they plunge us into mystery and fill us with awe. But also, do they not infinitely console?

Further comment on them, it seems to us, would border upon the profane, and their mere citation seems to form a fitting close to this our effort towards saying something not entirely inept upon a subject too big for adequate treatment by common man.

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## REVIEWS

SOUS LES YEUX DE L'INCROYANT .By Jean Levie, S.J. (Desclée de Brouwer. Edition Universelle; 90 Belgian francs.)

During a recent course in apologetics for university students one student rather intelligently asked the following question. 'Why is it that these arguments and proofs seem so clear and convincing to us, and yet fail to make much impression on non-believers? Is it because we already believe and our faith causes us to look at these rational arguments in an entirely different way from non-Catholics?' Fr Levie's book is concerned with exactly the same problem. He says that thousands of unbelievers have opened our manuals only to close them even more unsatisfied and uneasy, while thousands of others have come into the Church, led by God, 'le long des chemins inconnus des manuels', and have only admitted the classical proofs after having been won over in other ways. Why should the same object, the classical argument of apologetics, have such a different effect on Catholics and unbelievers?

For Fr Levie the answer lies in *le Christ total dans son Eglise*; the traditional arguments are only convincing when seen in relation to the whole doctrine of Christ, which must be accepted at least as an hypothesis. Thus miracles must not be considered individually in isolation, but in relation to 'the miracle of Christ in the miracle of his Church'. The first step the unbeliever must take is the consideration of the documents, the Scriptures, and even the purely technical and objective problem of the authenticity of these documents cannot escape the subjective factor, the general conception of Christ held by the enquirer. Just as the Catholic, the Marxist and the Nazi all interpret the same historical facts in an entirely different way, so the interpretation of the facts contained in the Gospels will depend on what the interpreter thinks of Christ. Hence the whole domain of Biblical criticism is affected by the answer to the question, 'Quid putas de Christo?' The whole of Fr Levie's first chapter is a plea for this *total* point of view in judging the faith. No one argument is convincing when separated from the whole Christian synthesis, and each particular argument is cogent precisely in the degree in which it reveals the centre of intelligibility, which is *the whole Christ in his Church*. Just as the apologist must not rely on any one argument, so the enquirer must not allow any one difficulty to turn him aside from the total view of the Christian faith.

Fr Levie's second chapter on 'The intellect in search of faith' deals with the relation between reason and faith. Christianity, he says, is fundamentally intellectual: right belief necessarily implies right thought. The author implores us not to let our minds be stifled by the atmosphere of the *sacristie mal aérée*, and pours scorn on those Catholics who are positivists, materialists or agnostics in their professional lives and Christians only on Sundays in their parish church, or at family prayers in the evening. The reader is here reminded of Fr Vincent McNabb's insistence on the disuse of reason being the besetting sin of Catholics. As Fr Levie so rightly says, the Catholic has not to use his mind less but rather to think more and to think better than anyone else; he is not simply an automaton, carrying out the directions of his superiors who do the thinking for him, but an active and conscious member of Christ's Mystical Body, with his own personal share to fulfil in the advancement of even purely secular knowledge, since he bears within himself the help, and therefore also the responsibility of the divine light of Faith. In this connection it is worth remembering that of the seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost four are given to the human intellect.

The second part of the book compares the mind of the Christian with that of the unbeliever, with special reference to their different approaches to Scriptural problems. Again the insistence is on *the whole Christ living in his Church*. This part of the book was written in 1926, so there is some inevitable repetition.

In the third part, based largely on the Epistles of St Paul, Fr Levie



insists on the fact that the privileges we enjoy as Catholics carry with them certain obligations to society and to our fellow men. Here there is much criticism, but never of the ill-natured destructive sort, every word being written with profound sincerity and loyalty. In conclusion Fr Levie sums up the whole situation in an Epilogue, 'I believe in Jesus Christ', a magnificent confession of faith.

No teacher or student of apologetics can afford to miss this valuable book. It is by no means easy to read, especially the chapter on 'Belief in order to think rightly', which is very condensed and difficult to follow; also, the fact that the various chapters were written at different times has caused a certain amount of discontinuity and repetition. But anyone who is prepared to make the necessary effort and possesses the intellectual stamina to persevere to the end will find his time well rewarded.

DROSTAN MACLAREN, O.P.

THE DRY WOOD. A Novel by Caryl Chessander. (Sheed and Ward; 8s. 6d.)

Naturally enough we open Miss Chessander's first novel with more than customary expectation and perhaps with some presuppositions. That she is a poet with a strong sense of the communion of saints we already know. Perhaps we shall be disposed to look for 'influences' and we shall not be disappointed if we consider that a profitable search. There is the Bruce Marshall strain; for that matter there is also the Churchillian strain: we hear of blood, sweat and tears more than once. In this fashion we might find whatever we care to look for in any novel and remain blind to the unique thing that it is. The unique thing that this novel is gradually grows in our minds as we read on, and in this respect the work resembles, to use Miss Chessander's own image, those Japanese imitation flowers which we used to buy and watch unfolding in a glass of water. By the time we reach the twenty-second out of twenty-four chapters we are quite certain and the two remaining chapters have a Delius-like quality inasmuch as they fade us back into the whole world of which this story took and examined one part. That is Miss Chessander's first achievement.

She chooses to take a cross-section of the life of the Church as the subject of her novel and therefore her first difficulty will be to keep the reader's feet firmly planted on the ground while his head is among the stars. Because she is a poet she surmounts this difficulty for the poet sees the eternal in the temporary and insignificant: the death-bed of a child of five is truly an altar of immolation and his parents are truly sacrificing ministers. But because she is a meditative poet she does not always succeed. She stops to browse too often. Browsing is good and necessary but it can make the novel uneven, not because it holds up the narrative but because it means that our eyes are held too long on one object in the landscape and we are in danger of losing our sense of proportion. This is a serious defect, but it is one that can

only be expected in a first novel. It arises most likely from over-anxiety and its absence might have been a bad omen for the future. The same anxiety is perhaps responsible for her too heavy underlining in places. We are given the impression that she cannot sketch economically, but this is not true as the excellent sketch of the apostasy of a Jewish family (ch. 16) proves. The impression is made, I think, by a certain self-consciousness about imagery which makes her anxious to focus our eyes on it by gesticulating. One example might be taken: '... silence returned to the room, falling flake by flake on the Archbishop's soul, as snow falls flake by flake on the world'. Now if the last clause were omitted the whole sentence would be stronger and more serene, and we should not be irritated by what looks like fussiness and over-anxiety to make the picture clear. None the less Miss Houselander has the gift of economy and when she does use it she guides our eyes skilfully over the terrain focussing them at the right time on the right spots.

Yet again she is not always content to let the truth speak for itself; her meditations too frequently become didactic and she appears anxious to underline her capital letters. Not that all didacticism must be cut out; much of it is good, as, for instance, Donna Rosario's teaching at Monsignor Frayne's dinner party. But then Donna Rosario is one of the characters who speak for themselves. The tendency to turn the characters into transparent instruments on which the author pipes her tune leads us to feel we are being talked at. We are often conscious that it is Miss Houselander that is talking and not Timothy Green or Fr O'Grady. Somehow she doesn't always manage to project her thoughts outside herself into her characters, and the writer often intrudes (obviously unwillingly) between reader and text. Perhaps that is partly because she has a limited number of things to say and after a time we begin to recognise her themes. After all the themes of the symphony of God's creation are inexhaustible. On the other hand it is the penalty that the poet-novelist often has to pay. The poet, especially the lyricist, moves in circles retracing his steps again and again, and because he is a poet the infinite depths of the significance of his tracks are never exhausted. But when he enters the realm of novel writing he must be as concerned with the shape of the tracks as with their spiritual significance. That is to say that though he does in fact reiterate he does so through different mouths and as a novelist he is as much concerned with the mouths that speak as with the words uttered. His characters must live and they must be varied. It is only to be expected that Miss Houselander, a poet, would have difficulty in making her characters self-subsistent. Again she has by no means failed—witness Solly Lee, Donna Rosario and Monsignor Frayne—but there is a general tendency to turn them into puppets. This is brought about, in part at least, by a looseness of style and poor prose rhythms. Far too often we find ourselves wading through a catalogue of epithets and expressions which does nothing to keep the thought moving. There is little variation of light

and shade in the prose rhythms and the result is a sadly uniform grey.

Here again it is necessary to point out that Miss Houselander is not simply a careless writer who has so far got away with it by writing meditative prose in an uncritical age. She has in fact a great gift of imagery—doors closing 'gently like a secret'; a flower girl's 'bonfire of chrysanthemums'; 'the soft wash of people's voices'. She often chooses the epithet that brings you up short: 'shy moustaches'. Time and again she holds back and packs her punch into the last phrase of a paragraph. Irony and wit are all there, and though they often need polish to give them rapier sharpness they are sometimes delicate enough to leave us wondering whether perhaps she has her tongue in her cheek. Despite all this however her prose remains loose and it must be admitted that it sometimes comes undone and falls down into the otiosity of 'awful china' and 'dreadful washstands'. This slackness is responsible for much of the lack of differentiation among the characters and for the impression left with us of an instrument not quite sharp enough. A similar slackness allows her to leave simple inaccuracies in the text: heavy make-up (so I am told) does not 'flake off' under the influence of tears (p. 21); presumably it is on his beat and not 'on point duty' that the footsteps of the policeman were heard by Timothy at night (p. 91). Perhaps these criticisms seem petty and they would not indeed be worth noticing except as symptoms of a deeper carelessness which does harm to a fine book.

All this criticism however would be both ungenerous and unjust if it were not pointed out that the book is great enough and strong enough to deserve severe pruning and that for the safety of future novels it is worth while. Moreover any estimate would be completely untrue if it were not at the same time pointed out that these defects are only one side of the picture. In fact they are not even one side; they are merely flaws in a very good novel. It is not a Marshall or a Waugh; it is first of all written by a woman. And so we look for the attributes of a woman novelist. We shall not find a Jane Austen, but we shall find many of the qualities that make female novelists unique; tact, depth of understanding and sympathy, a wit that is finer than a needle. But above and beyond all these qualities we shall find a feeling for a truth which most novels never seek to reveal: a feeling for Eternal Truth wrapped in the clouts of Riverside. There lies Miss Houselander's greatness. She sees Christ in the saintly priest and in the guttersnipe. Because this is true greatness she can get away with much that is artistically defective; and because this is the greatness of Christianity itself it is only right to desire the removal of the defects.

GERARD MEATH, O.P.



'WORLD SCOUTING': 'Missionnaires' (Duckett; 9d.)

This special edition of *Missionnaires*, an international missionary review edited by the Society of Jesus, was specially brought out for the Jamboree which has just taken place in France. It gives a vivid pictorial account of the Scout movement throughout the world and particularly on the mission field. It is good to hear of the more serious side of scouting as a method of education and social service. The French have been quick to discover the potentialities of scouting as a movement of Catholic action. It has produced many vocations to the priesthood and it plays quite a notable part in their national life. The next few years will be crucial for the movement, for it is experiencing serious growing pains. Is it a mere passing enthusiasm or is it called to play a responsible part in the reconstruction of a war-broken world?

S.B.

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## EXTRACTS

MAN'S DELIVERANCE is the theme of the latest *cahier* published by *Jeunesse de l'Eglise* (Petit-Clamart, Seine: 160 francs). Two hundred large pages provide an ample arena for a discussion which has those qualities of intellectual alertness and apostolic confidence which mark so much French Catholic writing today. Marxism, Existentialism, intellectual freedom, the artist's self-sufficiency: all these are described. And the answer: God the deliverer, considered in modern Protestant theology, Islamic tradition, Hindu mysticism, and, above all, in the Christian life of grace.

The life of the spirit can too easily in the imagination be shut off from the life of the created world, which, in its degree, no less certainly reveals the providential work of redemption. Prayer itself is never ultimately private, and the sacramental mystery affirms for all time the unity of all the things that God has made—one in their need of deliverance, one in their dependence on its single source. And history itself has its part, as Père Montuclard emphasises in his introductory essay on 'The Mediation of History and the Mediation of the Church'.

'The Church and History draw mankind in different directions, directions that are sometimes contradictory. But there is only one salvation for humanity and we have the assurance that it is towards that salvation that the Church is infallibly advancing. Where then does History lead us? Towards the abyss, towards destruction? Are its works only ephemeral and useless? Is History condemned, because it follows its own ways which are not those of the Church, to remain wholly outside that design through which God accomplishes the true realisation of mankind and of the universe? Or

rather do the Church and History collaborate, each according to its fashion, in the Salvation—the same Salvation—of man and of humanity?’

Such is the dilemma, and it is the basic one of our time. If it be true that the secular world ignores the central truth of Christian redemption which alone gives meaning to its life, it may be equally true that Christians have too limited a view of the horizon of grace, which may extend far beyond the ‘private’ territory of their experience. It is a sane corrective to a ghetto pietism to recognise the infinite range of redemption. ‘To believe that in Christ through his Cross the enmity of the Church and human History is surmounted and conquered is for man the revelation of Salvation. That is the perspective of the Christian who wills, in all he does, to be the collaborator of God in the working out of his unique design’.

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SAINT BENOIT LABRE was born in 1748, and his bicentenary has a special meaning for us today. This extraordinary saint, who failed in all he did by human reckoning, who wrote no books, founded no order, in fact *did* nothing but wander over Europe as the poorest of pilgrims, is, says Jean Riverain in a most original study in *Etudes* (October), a reminder of ‘the true internationalism’: he was at home everywhere he went because he was at home with God.

‘The great evil of our century, from which Europe is suffering not only in its economy but in its spirit too, is that of closed frontiers, that dark nationalism which is perhaps more dangerous to the Christian community than even Marxist propaganda. Christianity needs movement and mutual exchange for its very life. Not enough for it to know that it is universal: it must live its universal life’.

And Benoît Labre challenges all those comfortable compromises which are the façade of a weakened faith. ‘A man must have three hearts’, he used to say: ‘one of bronze for himself, one of flesh for his neighbour, one of fire for God’. He would, one supposes, be surprised to find himself hailed as the patron of ‘Christian internationalism’. For him, God was to be loved and served everywhere, by everyone. His pilgrimages expressed his three-fold heart, and the fire of his love had all a fire’s contempt for frontiers.

Who is my brother? Catholics, by their very name, have the primary obligation of prayer for their brethren wherever they be, whatever race or place is theirs. Perhaps, after all, the Marshall Plan may find St Benoit Labre its best patron.

PRAEGUSTATOR.

# Les Editions du Cerf

CHRISTMAS 1947 is promised as austere. But the Church will celebrate the great Christian feast as she has celebrated every Christmas since the first, with joy and thankfulness. And not the least part of the Christian celebration is the lovely tradition of giving gifts. We have suggested here some books from *Les Editions du Cerf* which would (in our opinion) make attractive presents for friends and which would be welcomed by any convent or seminary library.

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